



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE INFLUENCE OF COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS ON THE TEACHING OF FRENCH IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The question of college entrance examinations in modern languages is one that cannot fail to be of interest to all teachers of these languages. The fact that a majority of our students are preparing for college and will, therefore, have to take these examinations makes the question a very important one both for the college instructor and the secondary school teacher. The former wishes to have in his freshmen classes only students who have been well prepared in French and German; and the latter looks to these tests for the standard expected of his pupils. Examinations are not the goal we are aiming at in our teaching, but they do influence our work in school to a large extent. It is, then, very essential that we should know how these examinations are prepared and how they influence the teaching of French in secondary schools.

In this paper I shall discuss only the French examinations of the College Entrance Examination Board. I do not feel competent to pass judgment on the German examinations of the Board.

The three French papers, namely, the elementary, intermediate, and intermediate and advanced, are prepared with great care. A great deal of time and thought is devoted to their preparation. And right here I wish to remind you that the examiners for the Board are not free agents in the same sense that college professors are in making out their own tests. The Board papers have to be framed in such a way that they meet the requirements adopted by the Board. And these requirements are the ones suggested by the Committee of Twelve of the Modern Language Association of America. The examiners cannot introduce all the innovations they would like, or make changes in the requirements as laid down by the College Entrance Examination Board.

Since 1908 each one of the three examiners in French has prepared one of the three papers. When the papers are ready they are sent to the examiners in turn for criticisms and suggestions. Then the examiners hold a conference further to discuss the papers, and frequently important changes are made. Next the papers are

looked over by a Committee of Revision made up of secondary school teachers and this committee sometimes insists on certain changes tending further to improve them. This procedure is followed in all the subjects offered by the Board. Before the papers are finally printed they are sent to the three examiners for proof reading. This plan was adopted at my suggestion in 1908 to avoid some of the gross errors that crept into the earlier examinations in French.

All the examiners in French are very careful to follow as closely as possible the requirements of the College Entrance Examination Board in preparing the three examinations. If you are not wholly satisfied with the kind of papers set, do not put all the blame on the committee of examiners. The thing to do is to see that the requirements are modified. The examiners cannot do this although they can and do try to interpret the requirements in a liberal spirit. For example, I have insisted lately that the questions on grammar be questions on applied grammar and not merely memory questions, such as giving lists of forms or stating rules. I believe that that is as it should be. Then, last year all the questions were stated in French on the B and BC papers, a concession to the advocates of the direct method. We also put on the elementary paper a few questions in French to be answered in that language. For several years opportunity was offered on the B and BC for free composition. Furthermore, a question on pronunciation has been added to the A paper, with the distinct purpose of encouraging teachers to lay more stress on oral work in preparing students for college. And until we have an aural test, as I hope we shall have before long, that is all the examiners can do to test the aural and oral preparation of the candidates in French. I am sure that that question, however unsatisfactory it may have been, has served its purpose in directing the attention of teachers of French to this all important phase of modern language instruction.

We have also exerted great care in the selection of the French passages to be translated. Of late years the selections have been taken entirely from modern authors, even for the BC paper. The aim of the examiners has been to choose material that would be within the capacity of boys and girls of sixteen, seventeen and eighteen to understand and interpret. Ever since I have served as associate examiner in French, (i. e. since 1907, except for the years

1914 and 1915), we have tried to grade the three papers as carefully as we could. We have kept in mind the fact that the selections to be translated into English were to be sight translations, and that, therefore, they should test the candidate's ability to read at sight. And when I say French I mean simple French for the A paper and French of ordinary difficulty for the other two papers.

The English sentences on the A paper and the connected passage of English on the intermediate paper have frequently been based on the French text. This is done to meet the requirements of the Board, which are as follows:

"At the end of the elementary course the pupil should be able . . . to put into French simple English sentences taken from the language of every day life or based upon a portion of the French text read. And at the end of the intermediate course . . . to translate into French a connected passage of English based on the text read." The passage of English on the BC paper is not based on the text to conform also to the requirements, which state that "the pupil should be able to translate into French at the end of the advanced course a passage of easy English prose as well as write a short essay on some simple subject connected with the works read." The examiners also feel that at this stage the pupil ought to be able to translate easy English prose into French. But it ought to be easy English, where the thought is not too complicated and the language simple.

The same care is taken in regard to the question which for lack of a better name I shall call free composition. Of late years the subjects chosen have been simple and well within the capacity of the candidate who is well prepared. I remember very well how poorly that part of the examination used to be answered by the majority of the candidates when it was first introduced. As a matter of fact it was so wretchedly done that very little credit could be given for it. Now, although there is room for improvement, we are getting much better results. This is due partly to the fact that the subjects chosen by the examiners for this free composition are not beyond the knowledge and ability of the candidates. They are no longer requested to write a hundred words on such indefinite subjects as "The French Revolution," "The Declaration of Independence" or "The San Francisco Earthquake." The subjects are selected from topics on which the

student has been drilled in class, namely, a railroad trip, the description of a school or classroom, a letter to friend inviting him (or her) to visit his home, the description of one of the characters of one of the books read in preparing for the examination, and other subjects like these. Sometimes definite directions are given so that the candidate will know just how to proceed. For example, on one of the papers last year the question was stated like this: "Faites en français la description de la maison que vous habitez. Dites où elle est située, combien d'étages elle a, ce qu'on voit devant et derrière la maison, etc. Décrivez l'une des pièces." With such definite directions the student knows just what is expected of him and can give a much better account of himself.

I have mentioned all these points to show you that the French examiners have endeavored to prepare examination questions that would be a fair test of the students preparation in French. Mistakes have been made, of course, but they have been mistakes of omission rather than mistakes of commission. As far as I know no French examiner has set a paper with the avowed purpose of catching the candidates by asking unfair questions.

A word about the marking of the French answer books may not be out of place right here and may throw some light on the results of the French examinations. The system used by the French readers is different from the one used by readers in other subjects. In the first place, no reader reads a whole book. While one reader reads the French passage, another reads the grammar question and the composition question. No marks are put in the book, but the value given to each part of the test is placed on the left hand upper corner of the cover of the answer book. Then the total credits are put in the proper place on the cover and signed by the two readers who have read this particular book. Any answer book marked less than 65% or more than 90% is re-read by two other readers to see if the first readers have made any mistakes or if they were too severe or too lenient in their marking. When there is a great difference in the values assigned to the different questions, then all the readers who have read this particular book consult to adjust the differences and to try to compromise on the values assigned. The plan may seem complicated at first glance, but a thorough study of the system will convince any one that it is a fair and impartial way of reading papers.

After serving as reader in French for over ten years and after using both methods, i. e. the method of reading the answer books as a whole or the method I have just described above of assigning different parts to the various readers, I must say that the latter is by far the better method. Greater accuracy in marking as well as greater speed is secured. It is almost impossible under this plan to condition a student who deserves to pass and to pass a student who ought to be conditioned. Each candidate gets a "square deal." The decision is not left to the judgment of one reader, but there are always at least two to pass judgment on every book. When you keep in mind that the French readers had 4602 answer books to correct last year, fully 819 more than the German readers had to read, and that the same number of readers were appointed in each subject, namely 25, you will understand how important is the question of speed and accuracy in marking. I ought to add that four of the French readers were assigned to the reading of the 92 Spanish books, so that the total number of answer books passed on by the French readers was 4,694.

Let us now consider how these French tests have influenced and are influencing the teaching of French in secondary schools. College examinations always have a certain influence on the work of the schools and can to a certain extent direct that work.

First of all, the ridiculous errors found in the earlier answer books are not so numerous now. It is true that the general character of these French examinations has been modified, as I have been trying to point out to you. But that does not explain the great difference that there is between the results of 1903 and 1904, for instance, and the results of 1914, 1915 and 1916. The real reason is to be found in the better preparation of the candidates. Teachers look to these examinations for a standard and plan their courses accordingly. I remember that in 1908, speaking before the Modern Language Teachers of New York City High Schools I made the statement that the chief reason for the poor showing of the candidates was their insufficient preparation to pass these tests. I no longer believe that is the case, at least, to such an extent. Candidates who are recommended by the schools usually do well. And I do not base my statement on the secretary's report only, but on my own personal observations as a reader in French. There are still many candidates who make bad mistakes, but the

general results are much better. That part of the examination which tests the real power of the student, namely, the English passage or the question on free composition, is answered in a much more satisfactory way than it was six or seven years ago. The French teachers know now what is expected of their pupils and they prepare them better. The same is true of the other parts of the examination. Pupils are being better trained in translating French into English and in the rudiments of French grammar. Fewer papers are marked very low on these two parts of the test. In short, the improvement along the whole line is very noticeable.

Again, the Board examinations in French have had some influence on the kind of texts which are read in schools. I am sure that very few schools are now reading 17th and 18th century authors, chiefly because the teachers know very well that no passage will be selected from authors earlier than the 19th century. Until last year I felt obliged to read some poetry with my intermediate class, because Princeton always put a poetical selection on its B paper and we always have a number of our boys who go to Princeton. Now, that is no longer necessary, as no poetry is put on the Board intermediate paper. We always reserve the passage in poetry for the BC paper. I mention this to show you how college examinations influence the secondary school teacher in the selection of the books he reads with his classes.

Several years ago the French examiners put a question on pronunciation on the elementary paper and a question on idioms on both the B and BC papers. It seemed to them that some recognition ought to be given to that all important feature of modern language teaching. The aim was not only to find out if the candidates could read French and knew certain idioms, but to call attention to the teachers of French to these two vital features of all language instruction. And I believe that aim has been attained. Teachers are certainly paying more attention now to pronunciation and the study of idioms, for the results obtained by candidates on this part of the examination is much better than it was at first. The question on pronunciation has not been an ideal question, because you cannot really find out in writing whether a student is able to read French or not. But it has made it clear to teachers that a correct knowledge of French sounds is an indispensable feature of secondary school work in that language.

So far we have been looking only on the bright side of the picture. Let us look on the other side also. It is a fact that no written examination has yet been offered which would prevent candidates from passing it who had an insufficient or improper knowledge of the subject. A student can learn how to translate French into English, memorize the necessary grammatical rules and forms, and secure enough drill in writing simple French sentences to pass the A paper and sometimes the B paper. And yet that student may have a very poor mastery of the language, may, in fact, know little about French. The practice of coaching pupils for college examinations without any regard for the actual acquisition of the subjects taught is still followed by some schools and by most of the summer camps. It is a vicious custom and only tends to lower the standard of modern language teaching. Let me give you an example.

Not long ago a new student entered one of my second year classes in French. This young man had been studying French for a year and a half or more at two different schools. He had just come from one of the oldest and best known boys' schools in the country. As usual I was conducting part of the recitation in French. I gave the class a dictation exercise in French and as this was a second year class no explanation was necessary. But the new boy seemed so bewildered that I asked him to stop after the class so as to find out the cause. He told me then that he had studied French a year and a half. During the first half year he studied *Chardenal* and the rest of the time Fraser and Squair's *Shorter Course*, the book I use with that class. I also found out that at the last school he attended they cover in one year all the lessons of the *Shorter Course* and study besides all the important irregular verbs and read in addition Super's *French Reader*. I asked him if his teacher used French in the classroom and gave them dictations in French. He said no. And I am sure he was telling the truth for he could not understand the simplest classroom French. Yet that school is sending boys to Harvard, Yale, Princeton and other colleges. The students prepared in those classes where French is not heard, or very little anyway, succeed in passing college examinations in French and German, and still are unable to understand a word of the spoken language or even read the language correctly. And this is not an unusual case. In the summer camps or coach-

ing schools they neglect absolutely the aural and oral side of modern language teaching and why? Simply because they know that that feature of modern language teaching is not at all necessary to pass successfully the college examinations in French and German. That is a problem we must face and the solving of which will go a great way toward raising the standard of modern languages in school and college.

Can we so frame modern language examination papers that it will be impossible for schools to do what many are doing? I am not ready to answer that question offhand. I believe we should give it a great deal of thought and seek a solution. We all believe in thorough preparation on the part of our students. The college instructor does not wish in his classes students who are poorly equipped. The secondary school teacher feels that his efforts to give his pupils a sound and thorough knowledge of French or German will have been in vain, if anybody, who has studied these languages a few weeks, can succeed in passing college entrance examinations in these subjects. Can this be avoided? I am sure it can be, but we shall have to modify our entrance requirements and frame examinations in such a way that students insufficiently trained in modern languages will be unable to pass them successfully.

In the first place all colleges ought to insist on an aural and oral test for modern languages. No candidate should be admitted to the freshman classes in French or German who has failed to pass these tests. An exception might be made for candidates who offer modern languages for entrance but who do not propose to elect this subject in college. But for all other candidates the ability to understand the foreign language and to answer simple questions in that language ought to be made compulsory.

I would also insist on more accuracy and greater efficiency in writing the foreign language than is done now. It is possible to learn how to translate French into English in a comparatively short time and a minimum of preparation; it is also possible to learn enough grammar to answer the direct questions on grammar that are usually found on a college paper. It takes, however, long and thorough study before one is able to write French correctly and well. If more credits were assigned to that part of the examination, I am positive that fewer candidates with only a few

weeks' preparation would succeed in passing the entrance examinations in French.

Then, again, if all freshmen courses in modern languages were conducted in the foreign language and students unable to follow such a recitation were conditioned, no student could attend these classes unless he had had plenty of practice in hearing and speaking the language. Such training would then become imperative for the schools. No teacher could then neglect that important feature of modern language instruction, because, if he did, his pupils would not be prepared for college and so be unable to go on with French or German in college. How much more inspiring it would be to teach French literature in that language than in English! It can be done and it should be done. I am sure that if the modern language departments of our colleges and universities came to an understanding on this point we would see great progress in the use of the direct method, not merely in the secondary schools, but in the colleges and universities of our land.

This association has placed itself on record in regard to an aural and oral test in French and German for college entrance. That is excellent as far as it goes. The trouble is it does not go far enough and will not solve the problem. The college professor should practise what he preaches and adopt the direct method in his own classes. He ought to conduct all his courses as far as possible in the foreign tongue. Why not do it in college work as well as in school work? There are obstacles in the way, I know, but they are not greater than those the secondary school teacher has to surmount. I am aware that some of our colleges are doing this and doing it admirably. But judging from the reports I receive and the information I gather from former pupils who are in attendance at different universities, it is not the usual thing. My former pupils tell me that they study literature, reading a great number of books and doing a great deal of written work, but that French is not the language of the classroom, unless they happen to have a native Frenchman for teacher. And what is worse, the pupil who has had very little or no opportunity to hear French or speak it seems to get along about as well as the one who has been carefully trained in this respect. The former may not secure as high a grade in his work as the latter, but he gets through. I claim such a condition of affairs ought not to exist. I am aware this criticism does not

apply to all our universities and colleges, but the point I wish to make is that it should not apply to any.

In conclusion, let me sum up in a few words what I have just said. It is a fact that the present college entrance examinations in French, and in German as well, do not prevent the student who is insufficiently prepared from passing them. Such a student is not fit, I believe, to go on with freshmen French and ought not to be admitted to that class. I propose two remedies for this evil. In the first place, we should have an aural and oral test for all candidates in modern languages and the inability to pass this test satisfactorily should condition any candidate in that subject. We ought also to assign more credits to that part of the written examination which really tests the candidate's knowledge of French or German, namely, the composition question. In the second place, I suggest that all freshmen courses in modern languages be conducted in the foreign language, as far as possible. Then the student who has been coached primarily to pass a written examination in French or German, but has had no practice in hearing the language and speaking it will find it impossible to follow with any success the courses given in that language. It may not be possible to bring this about all at once, without causing some trouble, but I firmly believe it ought to be done. The result would be most beneficial both for the college and the schools. The standard of modern language teaching would be raised and the quality of work greatly increased. Our slogan could then be in fact, as it is now in theory: "Quality and not quantity of work." Thoroughness would replace superficiality in the preparation of pupils who intend to enter college. The schools would have to give aural and oral training to the pupils taking modern languages. School teachers and college instructors would have to be thoroughly well prepared to give this instruction and our students would gain a real knowledge of French, German or Spanish that would be of practical value to them after leaving college. All this can only be secured by insisting upon a modified form of the direct method in all college exercises as well as in school work.

LOUIS A. ROUX.

Newark Academy, Newark, N. J.